**Solid Waste Committee**

**October 28, 2020**

**Minutes**

 **Present:** Cathy Curtis, Patrick McDonough, Lisa Wesel, Susan Drucker, Michael Smith, Susan Brown, Tessa Kinglsey, Bryan Benson, David Berry, Martha Cushing, Peter Lewis, Paul Denis, Seth Berry, Mark Favreau, Betsy Steen.

 **Call to Order:** Cathy Curtis calls the meeting to order at 5:30; quorum established.

 **Amendments to the Agenda:** No amendments added.

 **Approval of the Minutes from 10/14/20:** Patrick McDonough motions to accept the minutes; Tessa Kingsley seconds; all approve.

 **Old Business**

 **Review information from the 10/13 joint Solid Waste Committee/Select Board meeting and the 10/27 Select Board meeting:**  Cathy Curtis summarizes that at the 10/13 joint meeting the Select Board voted to (1) temporarily place the Silver Bullet recycling containers at the new Public Works facility until a permanent site is determined; (2) to stop curbside pick-up of recyclable materials due to a lack of sorting space; and (3) that all recycling would be temporarily suspended from November 1st until December 1st. At the 10/27 Select Board meeting, the option to continue using the recycling barn as a temporary site was brought back as an option. Discussion follows as to whether the Select Board had, in fact, voted to keep operations at the recycling barn or if it was just re-opening the possibility; agreement that, yes, the Select Board voted to keep the operations at the barn. Discussion about why the vote was re-opened: Susan Drucker believes that the site placement was reconsidered because Calderwood Engineering revised their floor load assessment for the barn, and that negotiations to use Richmond as a shared facility didn’t work out due to costs; with that new information, there was a request from a Select Board member to reconsider the barn as an option; a new vote was taken and the results were 3-2 for the barn. Cathy Curtis asks for confirmation that curbside recycling pick-up would still need to be stopped; Peter Lewis confirms that it will stop. Patrick McDonough asks if there will be snow plowing issues at the recycling barn because of the Silver Bullets and a new leased trailer; Bryan Benson believes that plowing will be an issue, and that he will have to discuss the details with the snow plower to work out the details; he adds that Casella may also need to come back out to re-evaluate the space for the containers when an office trailer is added but he is not sure. Cathy Curtis asks if recycling will now be able to continue on Thursday and Saturdays; Bryan Benson says yes, but that town ordinances require fencing around the dumpsters, and that the fencing placement/installation will also need to be coordinated with Casella; he summarizes that ”there are still things that have to be done.” Patrick McDonough asks how the new vote affects the primary purpose of this committee; Cathy Curtis says we have new guidance from the Select Board which will be coming up in the agenda. Tessa Kingsley asks if fencing would be needed at any other site; Bryan Benson answers that other than the new Public Works site where there is a natural tree-line buffer, all other sites would also require fencing. David Berry asks whether fencing is required for just roll-off containers or the private dumpsters that people might have in their yards; Peter Lewis answers that it applies to roll-off dumpsters; David points out that we’ve never had fencing around the metal container; Peter Lewis says it doesn’t matter how it used to be, that fencing is required for the roll-on dumpsters and that we’ve changed the specifications of the site. Bryan Benson clarifies that they hadn’t put up fencing for the current Silver Bullets placement because they hadn’t imagined staying at the barn this long. Lisa Wesel asks if the Silver Bullets are considered differently than the scrap metal container in the ordinance; Bryan Benson says that he doesn’t know enough about the ordinance to say, it’s just what he’s been directed to do.

**Update on the Silver Bullet Containers and increased hours of facility access:**

Bryan Benson reports that the Silver Bullets have been packed and that they’re moving about one and a half a week. Cathy Curtis asks if the current hours have been sufficient; Bryan Benson answers yes, that there have been about 100 -110 vehicles on Thursdays and Saturdays, with Saturday’s numbers continuing to climb. David Berry asks how much tonnage is being picked up; Bryan Benson answers that the lightest container was 1.1 ton and the heaviest container was 1.32 - 1.34 tons. Cathy Curtis asks what it costs when a container is emptied: Bryan Benson answers $360-365; David Berry asks about a tip fee, Bryan Benson answers that there isn’t a tip fee yet, that “we are in talks”. Lisa Wesel asks if we should assume that the Silver Bullet tonnages will go way up when there’s no more curbside recycling pick-up; Bryan Benson says he’ sure it will go up some, but until people start showing up he can’t know for sure. Bryan Benson follows up about the idea of providing a dedicated cardboard dumpster: he says that Scarborough pays to buy cardboard but the rate is the lowest he has ever seen ($15/ton) and that once you offset that against the cost of the hauling fee ($490), his opinion is that it shouldn’t be considered a possibility. Cathy Curtis agrees; she asks what the highest rate cardboard has been; Bryan Benson answers that he has seen it as high as $127/ton; David Berry says that he has seen it close to $200 and adds that it’s based totally on supply and demand and that he believes it will be worth money again someday. Discussion about Casella costs and billing; discrepancy between what Casella had estimated and what appeared on the first bill (estimation was more than bill); Bryan Benson says that pick-up costs for each container averages $377.

**Update on information-sharing with public and Facebook Page:** Tessa Kingsley reportsthat she continues to run information by Bryan Benson before communicating anything, and she reiterates that if there are ever any questions or concerns within the committee that they be discussed during committee meetings and not on facebook. Betsy Steen asks for the exact address of the recycling page; Tessa Kingsley answers “Town of Bowdoinham Solid Waste Department”. Betsy Steen wants to make sure that everyone is aware of the recycling column that runs in the Times Record every Tuesday (“The Recycle Bin”); she offers to send copies to Tessa Kingsley. Tessa Kingsley asks that if the final resting place for the Silver Bullets is definitely the recycling barn, that an official list of what services we can provided be confirmed; Bryan Benson answers that last night’s re-vote “threw him for a loop” and he will have to re-evaluate what those things will be; he notes that it will be based on trailer size and where the trailer will be placed, but that he imagines that they would possibly be able to take lightbulbs, mercury devises, “stuff like that”; he clarifies that he wouldn’t collect hazardous waste, paints, or anything that produces fumes. Tessa Kingsley asks that the committee aim at consistent verbiage on facebook and elsewhere by using the term “container” instead of “dumpster” in referencing the Silver Bullets; she explains that “dumpster” can easily be misunderstood to mean trash only, and could add to residents’ confusion about exactly what services the town is still offering. Betsy Steen wants to confirm that what is collected in the Silver Bullets is actually recycled; Bryan Benson says that yes, everything is still the same other than the way the materials are transported, that Casella still pulls out what is financially worth recycling; he adds that the town receives no revenue for that material.

**Status of talks between Town and Leaseholder of Recycling Barn**: Cathy Curtis says that it is her understanding that Nicole Briand and David Berry are continuing talks about the two engineers’ reports, the fire marshal’s report, and the financial repercussions of those reports, and that it is still an ongoing process. David Berry confirms that is the case.

**Continued discussion on how to maximize revenue and reduce costs:** Cathy Curtis summarizes that we have talked about the lack of financial feasibility to sort and haul cardboard, and asks if the committee has any other ideas for reducing costs at the temporary location. Tessa Kingsley says that she has spoken at length with EcoMaine’s municipal support coordinator who will be putting together a proposal for Bryan Benson to look over; she explains that EcoMaine is a municipally owned non-profit organization that handles recycling and has a less expensive tipping fee than Casella, but adds that materials would have to be hauled to Portland and that would have to be arranged with an independent contractor, so those fees are currently unknown. She will provide more information when it becomes available. Susan Brown asks if EcoMaine provides a breakdown of what they recycle: Tessa Kingsley answers that they do: she adds that if EcoMaine makes revenue off of their recycled materials, member municipalities get a cut of that profit based on their collected tonnage. She notes that an additional benefit to working with EcoMaine would be their education outreach resources, that they are very invested in helping communities do better: they provide outreach to communities, recycling staff, and collectors. Susan Brown asks if Richard Plummer could do that hauling to Portland; Bryan Benson explains that Mr. Plummer does not have the right kind of truck to transport theSilver Bullets. Tessa Kingsley notes that EcoMaine provides containers without rental fees; Bryan Benson adds that the town doesn’t pay a rental fee to Casella because there isn’t a contract between the town and Casella at the moment; if we entered into negotiations about a contract, that would change; with prices so high right now Bryan Benson questions the wisdom of signing a contract and getting locked into a high rate.

**New Business**

**Review revised task document from town: (**Discussion about whether the document we would be discussing would be be the original version written up by Nicole Briand for the 10/13 joint Select Board/SWC meeting (see Addendum 1), or the (possibly) amended version that developed during that meeting; acknowledgement that we were working from Nicole Briand’s original version.) Susan Brown questions what our next steps will be once we’ve surveyed the town residents about their service preferences; Cathy Curtis thinks that our order of operations will be for the committee to first come up with a vision of what services ought to be offered based on residents’ input, and then to determine (with Eli Rubin’s help) what those services might cost, and where an appropriate location for those services might be (also based on costs); once we have that information, we should be able to come up with a consensus for a recommendation to the Select Board. She states that there is pressure on the committee to have recommendations ready this spring so that residents can vote on the outcomes at town meeting in June. Susan Brown wonders whether there might be pushback to our asking for those financials. David Berry says that he is doing financials for the barn right now based on what Calderwood Engineering said would be required, and that he would “hand them out”. He adds that he will most likely ask the engineer whom he hired for a second opinion to draw up a complete plan for whatever improvements will need to be made to the town’s leasehold. He notes that his understanding was that the town was also going to be gathering information about some of the costs from the town end of things: they already have done a feasibility study for the Public Works site, and “there is another one in the works”. He adds that nobody is going to want to come up with the money to do anything (at least from his standpoint) until there is a new longterm lease that would protect both the landlord and the town. Cathy Curtis summarizes that our committee can go ahead and come up with a vision about what we want a facility to be, focus on the resulting finances, and that hopefully during that time, David Berry and the town will have settled some of the repair/lease issues, and more information about other possible locations could also become available. Patrick McDonough requests that if we’re tasked with coming up with a vision for recycling, we should stop talking about the location/barn so much right now because it’s “way down” the road, and there are months of work ahead of us to just cover the vision piece. Tessa Kingsley agrees. Cathy Curtis says that she thinks we’re in agreement and that she hopes this meeting will launch us forward towards that vision.

**Discussion on whether the committee wants to continue this work:** Cathy Curtis explains that people were frustrated after the joint meeting with the Select Board on October 13. Lisa Wesel says that she feels better after tonight’s conversation, but that she feels that we have just been going around in circles since our May inception, which is a long time to just be spinning our wheels. She has been enormously frustrated that the tasks of the committee keep changing; she feels that we have spent a great deal of time with very little to show for it — other than Tessa Kingsley’s outreach program, and the sorted-out financials — because the direction from the town has been so unclear. She adds that she doesn’t feel the town has been working cooperatively with us. She wants the committee to keep going, but hopes that at the end there will actually be something to show for it. She concludes that no one of us have this much time to waste. Susan Brown says she has also felt a lot of pushback about recycling in general from some members of the Select Board, and while she is aware that we’re not supposed to be “married to the barn”, it almost seems that there is animosity whenever we even mention it, as if there were a hidden agenda; if she can be assured there is not a hidden agenda, and that our input will be respectfully considered by the board, and that we will be kept informed about changing circumstances by the town, that she is willing to continue serving on the committee. She would like to move forward with the vision for the program, and she will keep an open mind about where the site might eventually be, but she also doesn’t want the barn to be dismissed summarily as “just an old chicken barn” — she believes the barn itself reflects the spirit of recycling and reusing, but if it is determined to be financially prohibitive, she will whole-heartedly move on.

**Draft survey to gather town resident input on recycling:** Lisa Wesel says that Michael Smith had pointed out that calling curbside recycling “free” wasn’t accurate because it is paid for by taxes; Lisa suggests taking the word “free” out of the text. Discussion about additional wording. Suggestion to add a question about whether residents would be willing to pay for certain services if they end up being too expensive to offer otherwise. Tessa Kingsley mentions that Richmond residents purchase a $15 sticker that allows them to participate in the recycling program (with additional fees for bulky waste, tires, and etc.). Suggestion to add a question about whether residents would be willing to pay a fee for curbside recycling pick-up. Tessa Kingsley asks if we know how the survey will be sent out; Cathy Curtis answers not yet, that that is one of the things we’re going to figure out; Tessa Kingsley asks if a digital form would be appropriate and points out that it would make tracking and sorting data much easier; Cathy Curtis believes that we should offer multiple platforms (i.e., newsletter, mail, digital forms) in order to reach the greatest number of residents. David Berry wonders if residents should be asked if they still want a styrofoam drop-off option — while it costs the town money, it is quite expensive for residents to get rid of styrofoam as trash due to its bulk; Tessa Kingsley thinks that any service that the town currently offers should be included in the survey. Discussion about ranking formats, yes/no formats, and what kind of information each format would provide. Tessa Kingsley says that this shouldn’t be the only survey we send out, but just the beginning, that she envisions 4 or 5 surveys in order to narrow down information. Discussion about how many surveys ought to be sent out. Paul Denis suggests assigning budgetary values to each service so residents can see the consequences of saying yes or no; he feels it would offer a clearer way for residents to calculate their priorities. Lisa Wesel agrees but wonders (1) whether it would even be possible to begin to estimate those numbers, and (2) whether there might be creative solutions to some of the costs that haven’t been considered yet, and (3) she would like residents to be able to offer feedback without price considerations, so that we can best understand which services and solutions we ultimately ought to be aiming towards. (He adds that he has been attending meetings for the last four months and has seen the committee’s frustration; he says that the committee’s task had always included figuring out a vision for the program but that there hasn’t been much talk about that vision, that conversations have centered around the barn and its costs; he concludes that talking about the location ought to be secondary to the vision. Cathy Curtis notes that we were also originally tasked with getting the barn through the pandemic and that that took up most of the summer, and that those talks necessarily had to include discussions about the barn.) Susan Brown says that if we only talk about the money on the survey it will move the discussion towards the smallest possible program, but if we ask people what they want in order of importance, it will reflect what people actually want; in the same fact-finding effort, what the residents want will influence site choice (i.e., if the residents decide we should only provide Silver Bullet containers, the site will not need to provide storage); services might also have different costs at different locations, so she believes the first steps ought to be to find out what citizens want; she also believes it is important to provide information about what services have historically been provided, and education about which services save the town and the taxpayers money. Lisa Wesel asks Bryan Benson to review the list and make sure she has included all the services offered. Tessa Kingsley says that she believes it is important that the committee have a plan for what our steps will be for creating a vision, starting with a broad picture and narrowing it down to a concise vision; she believes we need to move forward in an organized way so we don’t lose traction or get lost along the way; she still recommends multiple surveys, but adds that we also need to know the deadline for when this information needs to be finalized. Cathy Curtis asks Peter Lewis to clarify a timeline; Peter Lewis says that that is a bigger question than he can answer. Lisa Wesel says that it would be easy enough to count backwards from the town meeting to when warrants have to be ready. Patrick McDonough offers April 15th as a deadline; members agree that would be a good timeframe.

Cathy Curtis suggests that we continue to revise the survey, ask Eli Rubin to help us create an electronic version of it, and at the next meeting we work backwards from April 15th in order to inform what our meetings will need to look like between now and April. Committee members agree.

Betsy Steen worries that if a survey is sent out before January 1st, it could get lost in the season. She adds that the next deadline for the town newsletter is December 1st, and she believes that it would be very helpful to have at least an article in the newsletter saying what the committee is doing and alerting residents to the imminent survey and why it’s important that they fill it out. Susan Brown agrees, and suggests that the note should be from the committee, not the town. Lisa Wesel says that it would be very difficult to offer multiple surveys with these time constraints in mind. Betsy Steen says if it’s not possible to get an article into the next newsletter, that the survey should at least be sent with a letter that offers similar information. Susan Brown suggests that the survey could go out with a letter before the January newsletter, and that the newsletter could then act as a reminder for residents to fill out the survey. Tessa Kingsley says that sending out a survey with a comprehensive article in the January newsletter including information that there will be additional surveys in both February and March would set up a streamlined information gathering system; she believes that waiting until January would not be a problem if we set up those timing goals. Lisa Wesel is concerned that if we continue to do surveys until March, that there won’t be time to establish costs. Tessa Kinglsey asks if determining costs is our responsibility; Cathy Curtis says that it is. Discussion about how many surveys will be useful, manageable, and possible. Cathy Curtis concludes that our next agenda will include finalizing survey details and producing a timeline for our upcoming work.

**Next Meeting:** Our next scheduled meeting will fall on Veteran’s Day; members agree to reschedule to **Thursday, November 12th at 5:30**.

Betsy Steen suggests that the committee invite Eli Rubin to the next meeting for his feedback on the survey and its timing; Bryan Benson will extend that invitation.

Tess Kingsley asks if we could have a discussion about the possibility of forming two-person sub-committees in order to move things along more quickly; general agreement from committee members and Cathy Curtis will add that to our next agenda.

Patrick McDonough says that he would like to hear more about what EcoMaine can offer the town; Tessa Kinglsey says that if Bryan Benson agrees that it is a program worth pursuing once he receives their proposal, that EcoMaine can provide us with a presentation, and/or if we simply want more information, they would also be able to provide that.

**Meeting is adjourned** **by Cathy Curtis at 6:50**.

**Addendum 1: Revised Tasks for Solid Waste Committee from Town Manager and Select Board (un-amended version):**

[E]xploring options for dealing with increased disposal costs and contamination rates, working on operating safely during the pandemic, and considering the options for improving our recycling and solid waste program including whether a new facility is needed.